

## DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING CENTER RATING SCALE (ECLCRS) TO ASSESS QUALITY IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The early experiences in the first few years of life “wires” the development for later years. The synaptic connections that occur in early years are influenced by the quality of experiences a child has. One of the important sources that influence early experiences is early childhood care and education centers. This is even more true in today’s context where more and more mothers are seeking gainful employment outside the home and the onus for caring and education the child is left to external agencies such as creches, daycares centers and early learning centers.*

*While some of these external agencies offer quality care, the care offered by others is questionable. Research indicates that richer the environment in terms of adult initiated experiences, play, parental involvement, activity / program etc, greater the neural network interconnections will be, leading to better learning and retention. Quality in an early care and learning center is dependent on various factors such as space, furnishing, health / safety practices, staff and program schedules among other parameters.*

*Today there is a felt need for an assessment tool that parents can use to identify an appropriate centers for their child to go to; the centers need a tool to carry out a SWOC analysis of their center and the concerned authorities need a tool to assess centers and allocate appropriate funding.*

*Therefore, the present research focused on the development of an assessment tool to help assess early learning centers. The developed tool, called the “Early care and learning center rating scale (ECLCRS)”, is a multidimensional scale that measures the essential features of quality in an early care and learning center. It is a scale which is easy to administer, score and analyze the results. ECLCRS consists of 2 parts. The first part gathers comprehensive information about the basic details of the early learning center. The second part of the ECLCRS consists of 164 items that are distributed across 11 components, namely policies and procedures, physical infrastructure, staff profiling, health and safety practices, activity / program schedules, adult initiated experiences, play, record maintenance, child assessments, parental involvement and community involvement.*

*The developed Early Care and Learning Center Rating Scale use a 7 point Likert style format in which the observer is required to rate the early care and learning center based on the observations made. The observation scoring ranges from 0 to 6 - 0 being “absent”, 1 “inadequate”, 2 minimal, 3 “satisfactory”, 4 “good”, 5 “very good” and 6 “excellent”. Score 1 falls in between “absent” and “minimal”, score 3 in between “minimal” and “good”; score 5 in between “good” and “excellent”. For certain items, symbols have been added as indicators to describe or explain the item to facilitate accurate observation. A detailed manual has also been developed to help in understanding the tool, its administration, scoring and interpretation of scores.*

**KEYWORDS:** Quality, Assessment, Early Learning Centers, Early Care & Learning Center Rating Scale (ECLCRS)

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## INTRODUCTION

0 to 6 years are globally recognized as the most critical period of life, where the experiences received by the child “wires” the development for later years. The early experience that a child receives establishes neural connections that form the basis for language, reasoning, social skills, behavioral, emotional and mental health. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2013, p.8) concluded that “in order to improve learning outcomes and sustain them in the long run, the early years may be the best place to invest”. Investment in early years is through providing quality experiences to all children. Today, both parents are gainfully employed outside the home and the responsibility of providing enriching experiences falls upon external agencies such as creches, day cares and early learning centers. Research suggests (Mashburn, et.al., 2010) that children attending a good quality pre-school has a positive effect of their academic performance. This highlights the need and importance of providing quality early care and education.

In the Indian scenario, early care and learning centers can be broadly classified under three sectors –public, private and non-governmental. In the public sector, the Government has initiated a number of constitutional policies and provisions which cater to children under 6 years of age and also commits to universal access to quality early childhood education. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) a nodal department for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), covers over 38 million children under the ICDS scheme. 1.4 million Anganwadi centers have been established to cater to the underprivileged children. However, a study conducted by the National Institute for Public Co-operation and Child Development (2014), reports that the ECE centers run by government agencies were in dilapidated condition, the norms set for ECCE centers were not adhered to and even basic facilities not provided.

On the other hand, private initiatives are targeted at children of economically better off families. These impart early care and education under different nomenclatures such as, kindergarten, nurseries, and preschools and so on. While some of these early care and learning centers provide quality care and education, the quality of others are questionable even though the importance of quality in early care and learning centers have been repeatedly underlined. The challenge in implementing quality early care and education still remains.

This leads to a felt need for assessing and establishing the quality of early care and learning centers. Therefore, the present study focused on the development of a tool to assess the quality of early care and learning centers.

## OBJECTIVE

The broad objective of the present study is to develop an assessment tool to assess the quality of early learning centers. The specific objectives were:

- To identify components that influence the quality of early childhood care and learning centers
- To identify subcomponents that could be included under the components identified in the previous objective
- To develop a Likert type rating scale for the assessing quality of the different components and subcomponents identified
- To evolve a scoring pattern for assessing and grading the quality of early care and learning centers.

## SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS ADOPTED

The development of the ECLCRS involved 8 phases.

### Phase 1: Identification of the Main Components for Scale Construction

Extensive review of the literature was carried out to identify components related to the quality of early care and learning centers. Scales already in the market were also reviewed for its suitability in the Indian scenario. The reviews yielded 11 components which were shortlisted for inclusion in the scale. The components identified for ECLCRS were: -

- **Policies and Procedures:** These are written statements of a course of action which is proposed for a specific issue in a center. Policies and procedures establish rules to be followed. These create standards of quality for care and learning. Policies and procedures establish expectations and accountability and without policies and procedures, early care and learning centers would lack the necessities to be provided for children.
- **Physical Infrastructure:** Focuses on the space and other basic facilities provided for children in the center.
- **Staff Profiling:** Include aspects related to teaching, non-teaching staff and the management techniques used in the centers. Aspects related to staff indicate the level of skills, competencies and knowledge the staff receives. Staff profiling also indicates the type of professional development the center carries out to enhance the skills. Therefore, the qualifications, education and training of ECEC staff are an important issue (OECD, 2006).
- **Health and Safety Practices:** Early care and learning center should provide an environment which is healthy and safety for the child to develop.
- **Activity / Program Schedules:** These are programs which reflect the activities of children in an early care and learning center.
- **Adult Initiated Experiences:** Typically, most of the experiences provided in an early care and learning center are adult-initiated, wherein adults act like catalyst in creating knowledge in children.
- **Play:** Children are competent explorers, hypothesizing every aspect and seeking knowledge from it. Children are inclined to play and they hook their ideas, thoughts and interests in it.
- **Record Maintenance:** It is an integral part of the center because well-maintained records help in the smooth operation of the center.
- **Child Assessments:** Child assessment is a critical part in high quality education as it helps in assessing the child and also the program delivery of the early care and education centers.
- **Parent Involvement:** The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) states, “High quality is a safe, clean and engaging place where parent can partner with trained professionals in order to help nurture and develop their children intellectually, emotionally and physically”.
- **Community Involvement:** Community involvement in the early development process is considered as one of the characteristics in high quality early care and learning center (Henderson, et. al., 2002). Thus, community involvement is considered in early care and learning centers to build a relationship with professionals and non-professionals of the community.

### Phase 2: Identification of Sub-Components for the Scale

The 11 components identified in the previous phase were broad and in this phase, it was further sub-divided into sub-components. Again, the extensive review of literature and related standardized scales studied to identify sub-components for each of the 11 components. Thus 28 sub-components were identified.

### Phase 3: Identification of Items for each Component / Sub-Component of the Scale

For the component and sub-component identified in the previous phases, specific items for each were identified once again through the extensive review of related literature and standardized scales. For certain items, symbols are added as indicators to describe the item to facilitate accurate observation. Thus, a total of 164 items were shortlisted for the scale. A summary of the first three phases is indicated in Table 1

**Table 1: Component / Sub-Component and Number of Items Shortlisted for ECLCRS**

Sl. No	Component	Subcomponent	Item
1	Policies and Procedures		05
		<b>Total</b>	<b>05</b>
2	Physical Infrastructure	Activity space	04
		Space for "Me" time	02
		Reading area	05
		Nap room	08
		Changing and Diapering	05
		Toilets	08
		Displays	05
		<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>
3	Staff Profiling	Staff details	09
		Classroom management skills	04
		Material management	03
		Support staff details	05
		<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>
4	Health and Safety Practices		01
		<b>Total</b>	<b>01</b>
5	Activity / Program Schedules	Transition and Routines	05
		Arrival and Departure	03
		Snacks and Meal time	04
		Field trips	04
		<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>
6	Adult initiated experiences	Curriculum basics	04
		Physical development / education	10
		Socio-Emotional development	03
		Cognitive development – Literacy	06
		Cognitive development – Numeracy	06
		Cognitive development – Science	07
		Cognitive development – Social Studies	04
		Aesthetic development – Arts	07
		Aesthetic development – Music	06
		Practical Skills	02
		Whole Group Activities	02
		<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>
7	Play	Adult initiated	03
		Child initiated	04
		<b>Total</b>	<b>07</b>
8	Record Maintenance		04
		<b>Total</b>	<b>04</b>

Table 1: Contd.,			
9	Child Assessments		08
	Total		08
10	Parental Involvement		07
	Total		07
11	Community Involvement		01
	Total		01
Subtotal			164 Items

#### **Phase 4: Development of a Multidimensional Scale for Assessment**

Review of standardized scales available in the market indicated the need for detailed assessment for the scale to be effective. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) had a 7 point Likert type scale and yielded detailed results. This scaling technique was adopted for the ECLCRS where the rating ranged from “absent” to “excellent”

#### **Phase 5: Scoring**

The ECLCRS is designed as a rating scale. The statement under each item is awarded a score after the observation. The score ranges from 0 to 6 and the rating ranges from “absent” to “excellent”. Thus, in the scale, 0 represents “absent”, 1 “inadequate”, 2 “minimal”, 3 “satisfactory”, 4 “good”, 5 “very good” and 6 “excellent”.

Four major categorizations of statements, namely “absent”, “minimal”, “good” and “excellent” are indicated in the scale. If the observation falls under these categories, then the observations will be scored 0, 2, 4 or 6. If the observations fall in-between these four categorizations then the in between scores will be awarded for the observations. For example; if the observations fall between minimal (2) and good (4), then an in-between score of 3 is awarded and the rating is termed “satisfactory”. Thus, the scores awarded for each rating is as follows:

#### **Phase 6: Calculation of Total Possible Scores**

According to the number of items present in the component / sub-component the total possible score was calculated. In the total possible score, a score range was developed for each component and sub-component, wherein the minimum score is 0 and maximum score depends on the number of items in component / sub-component. For example, if the sub-component has 6 items, then the minimum score would be 0 ( $6 \times 0 = 0$ ) and maximum score will be 36 ( $6 \times 6 = 36$ ). The intermediate scores would be 6 ( $6 \times 1 = 6$ ), 12 ( $6 \times 2 = 12$ ), 18 ( $6 \times 3 = 18$ ), 24 ( $6 \times 4 = 24$ ) and 30 ( $6 \times 5 = 30$ ).

#### **Phase 7: Calculation of Obtained Scores**

The obtained scores are calculated according to the observations made by the observer. The scores are multiplied by the number of items scored under each rating of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. For example: under the rating 4 if 2 items are scored then they obtained score would be  $4 \times 2 = 8$ , for 1 item if a rating of 6 is given then the score would be  $6 \times 1 = 6$ . So the total obtained scores would be 14 ( $8 + 6 = 14$ ).

#### **Phase 8: Analysing, Interpreting and Rating the Obtained Scores**

As indicated in phase 5 the statements are awarded a score ranging from 0 to 6 (absent to excellent) after observation. The ratings are calculated according to the scores given in the rating scale. For each component and sub-component, a rating chart is developed, according to the total score obtained in the component or sub-component is categorized either as absent, inadequate, minimal, satisfactory, good, very good or excellent.

The interpretation of the Early Care and Learning Center Rating Scale has a 3-tier interpretative strategy. The first-tier interpretation is to examine the sub-component responses, the second interpretation is on component responses and the third interpretation is on the overall score.

The first interpretation examines the sub-component item responses. According to the observation made and the scores obtained the sub-component is rated on the subcomponent rating chart. The rating chart would vary for each sub-component, since the number of items under each sub-component varies. The interpretation of sub-component would help in reviewing the individual items and this would conversely highlight the area of strength and weakness in the early care and learning center.

The second tier in the interpretation strategy is to examine the component responses. Each sub-component is categorized under each component. For example; under the physical infrastructure component, the sub-components are activity space, space for “me” time, reading area, nap room, changing and diapering, toilets and displays. The scores obtained for each sub-component will be calculated and categorized under the component rating chart.

In the third tier interpretation, the overall scores will be determined according to the sub-component and component scores. The overall scores will determine the range in which the early care and learning center falls and this will help in classifying the center according to the rating chart.

### Scoring Sample

**Table 2: Scoring Sample**

<b>Policies and Procedures</b>								
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1.</b>	<b>Absent</b>							
0.1	Policies and procedures do not exist in the early learning center							
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minimal</b>							
2.1	Policies and procedures are indicated but not put into practise in the early learning center			*				
2.2	Parents and Administrative staffs are given oral information about policies and procedures of the early learning center			*				
2.3	Teachers are sensitized about the center policies at the time of recruitment							
2.4	The policies and procedures are not reviewed							
2.5	Policies are developed addressing only one aspect of the center							
<b>4.</b>	<b>Good</b>							
4.1	Policies and procedures are spelt out and are practised in the early learning center							
4.2	Parents and Administrative staffs are given written information about policies and procedures of the early learning center							
4.3	Teachers are sensitized about the center policies, but are not updated as and when updates occur					*		
4.4	The policies and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis (annually or every 2 years)					*		
4.5	Policies are developed addressing one or more aspects of the center						*	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Excellent</b>							
6.1	Policies and procedures are spelt out, practised and displayed in the areas where practices generally occur. For example: Policies and procedures on changing and diapering are displayed in the changing and diapering area							
6.2	Parents and Administrative staffs are sensitized about the center policies and are updated regularly							
6.3	Teachers are sensitized about the center policies and are updated regularly							
6.4	The practices and policy is regularly reviewed and implementation closely monitored							

6.5	Policies are developed for all the aspects of the center							
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For policies and procedures the minimum and maximum score that a center can receive is indicated below

**Table 3**

Rating	Total Possible Score	Individual Item Score Obtained	Component Grand Total
Excellent	26 – 30	0*6 = 0	
Very Good	21 – 25	1*5 = 5	
Good	16 – 20	2*4 = 8	17
Satisfactory	11 – 15	0*3 = 0	
Minimal	6 - 10	2*2 = 4	
Inadequate	1 – 5	0*1 = 0	
Absent	0	0*0 = 0	
<b>Grand Item Total Obtained</b>		<b>17</b>	

In the above item, scoring is indicated. It is seen that a score of 4 has been awarded under minimal; a score of 8 has been awarded under good and score of 5 has been awarded under very good. As the center has obtained a score of 17 and 17 falls in the range of 16 to 20 possible scores, the center is said to have “good” policies and procedures.

### Why Early Care and Learning Center Rating Scale

The Early Learning Center Rating Scale is a comprehensive scale which would provide detailed information about the early care and learning center. This is a scale which is easy to administer. The ELCRS can be used to by researchers, teachers, administrators, students, social workers and other professionals in the field, who can use this scale to observe, assess, and rate different early care and learning centers according to the parameters in the scale. The ECLCRS can be used by different centers to carry out a SWOC (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges) analysis to address the weaknesses and challenges that the center is facing.

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